

INDEXA



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Palestine 2009 (E44M)—from an idea to airline tickets

By Giorgio Minguzzi, IZ4AKS

A person who devotes his spare time to the realization of a full-fledged amateur radio DXpedition hardly ever reveals, or perhaps he cannot remember, all the activities and tasks undertaken from the moment the idea is conceived in the mind until the radio is switched on and transmitting begins. Normal practice of reporting usually obliges the scribe to not provide all the pieces of information about how licenses were obtained, how materials are transported, and how all the preliminary phases of the work itself were completed. Yet, some of the most trying and complex activities occur during this time. Many DXpeditions are “scrubbed” when all the required factors fail to come together as planned.

The E44M DXpedition encountered its share of start-up difficulties. In the interest of giving the



The team that brought you E44M showing you “INDEXA was there”!
Seated: Vinicio (IK2CIO), Salvador (C31CT), Aurelio (IZ0EGM). **Standing:** Giorgio (IZ4AKS), Simone (IZ0BTV), Les (SP3DOI), Pasquale (IZ8IYX).

prospective DXpeditioner a taste of what difficulties may be faced, allow me to break the deep-seated taboo and report some of the bumps in the road we had to overcome. I will leave the task of reporting the DXpedition Diary to my colleague elsewhere in this publication.

Let the clock hands go back to 2004, when I visited Israel for the first time. It was a business trip, but I got acquainted with various people and native col-

leagues. Palestine was there, just a few kilometres distant and I started asking questions regarding how to gain entrance, how to ensure safety and what hotel accommodations I might find, etc...

The following year I decided to return to Israel with my wife to visit the Holy Land. I spent nine days there and on that occasion I went to Palestine for the first time in my life. I visited some towns and I

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Inside. . .

A few words from INDEXA President Gary Dixon, K4MQG

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started thinking that Bethlehem was a good place for a DXpedition. I contacted a hotel and asked if I could inspect its roof despite the skepticism of the receptionist and the guests staying there. I realized that the roof might host at least two verticals. The hotel owner's son committed himself to help me obtain a license, since nobody had answered me at the Minister's office and rarely did I find someone speaking English. Unless someone helped me, it was impossible to communicate, and I decided to return home without fulfilling my mission. Various months passed with me sending e-mails, making phone calls and faxes—then one day my mobile phone rang: "Tomorrow you will be granted the license, but one document is still missing. The Ministry would like to know whether you will broadcast music or politics! Can you send it to me?" You must visualize the image of a fine piece of crystal falling to the ground smashing into uncountable pieces? I felt as disintegrated as that crystal, because I was going to obtain a broadcast installation license! Fantastic! But, it was not what I wanted!

I decided not to give up, and I went on looking for a solution. To be precise, I did not want a broadcast license, but, rather, I wanted to establish a relationship with someone at the ministry that could grant me an amateur radio license. Yet, due to the upcoming elections, I imagined everything would change and the already established contacts would have to be totally re-created. I was soon convinced that I would never obtain the longed-for license if I could not personally be in Palestine to pursue my goal.

What could I do? Suddenly an idea came to my mind. I needed someone who could understand what I was trying to accomplish, who speaks English, and who shared some interests with me that we could both relate to. I opened Skype, selected the location "Palestinian territories", and pressed the 'search' button. I contacted all the accounts springing from the research and I tried to explain who I was and what I wanted. I was offended various times before finding an engineer in telecommunications living in West Bank. He was Arabic, Catholic, had a high university culture, and was surprised that someone from Italy, like me, was interested in his work. He was perfect—he was the man I was looking for. Ibrahim did the same work as I did, so it was easy to become friends. A fortnight after that I touched upon what I wanted to do. He was so kind that only two

days after we talked he went to the Minister to personally ask for the documents I needed. The license was going to be in my hands in a few months. However, by now time had already moved on to the year 2007. The documents that were to be sent to me would come at a time when I had already become involved in another project. Frankly, I was very satisfied about how the new work was going, so I decided to keep the license in the strongbox for future better times—it was just too hard to manage two such complex projects at the same time.

At Friedrichshafen exhibition I met Ros, 4Z5LA, at the Israeli Association booth and I mentioned our idea. My friend Ros, who was very supportive of the idea from the beginning, promised to help us and we decided to keep in touch as soon as our idea progressively blossomed. Meanwhile CQWW SSB 2007 was behind me, and I was now free after some very hard working months. *(IK4AKS is being modest in not telling you he was a lead player in winning the World Multi/Multi DXpedition Title operating as 1A3A in that contest. —The Editor)*

I soon learned that OM2DX announced his planned activity from Bethlehem in December, 2007. Learning of their eventual successes positively raised my enthusiasm for our project.

Summer holidays had to pass before starting work on the radio project again. However, the end of August was a beehive of activity. The town of Rimini, Italy hosts a large Christian Conference each August. I arranged to meet Sobhy there. Sobhy is an Israeli of Arabic descent whose religious preference is Maronite

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Catholicism, and he attends the conference regularly. Among Sobhy's many skills is that he is an excellent travel agent. He had organized the pilgrimage to the Holyland I participated in during 2005. He is a man with great humanity, and he has a great heart. I asked him to help me find a suitable logistic location for a DXpedition. He answered me: "Don't worry, son". I was concerned something would go wrong since everything seemed too easy for him. Yet, after only a short period of time, I decided to accept help from him and agreed to target our DXpedition for the period from 1st to 11th January 2009. He would be there waiting for us. He booked a Hotel in Biet Jala, near Bethlehem, big enough to host our facilities. Moreover, the location was safe and nobody would bother us.

At about the same time we discovered that another radio team was planning to visit Palestine, and I received a phone call from Fabrizio, IN3ZNR, informing me that their team was well along in their plans to operate from Palestine almost at the same time called for in our plans. We were presented with their dates. Since our planned operation was approximately a month earlier than theirs, with a certain fair-play, their group withdrew. We gave some thought about postponing the outset—there were so many tasks to be accomplished in E4—because such a sporty deed made us wonder about the opportunity to unify our work with the other team. Yet, our flights had a fixed schedule, so we decided we could not combine our two events. I would like to point out that the cooperative behaviour we encountered is not always the norm. We hope we were witnesses to a growing cooperation between radio amateurs since we all share the same passion.

Now we were to start in earnest the preparation of the material of our equipment to be transported: our weight limit was 20 kg luggage per passenger and the overweight charges were very high. We reached the conclusion that we would bring something with us and we would ship the remaining material in a container, so I contacted a famous shipping agency in Ravenna which has offices all over the world and also in Israel. This was the first mistake made in the course of this adventure. In fact, a courier informed us that every Saturday a vessel departed for Israel and our material would be on it if we delivered the material to them two or three days before the departure. After that, it would reach the final destination after six further sailing days. Thus, we started to prepare the wooden box full of material: amplifiers, cables, fibre barrels, antennas and radios (please keep in mind this particular). The fumigated wooden case was 1.4 cubic metres wide and was more than 200kg; when IZ4DPV sealed its covering we soon

found that our shipper's assurances were far from real. Delays began just the estimated day of the case collection; the courier delayed its arrival by approximately 72 hours and we risked missing the booked vessel. So, we started calling our shipping agent who told us of his difficulties and justified them with a finance inspection. I suspect that this inspection is a common topic used by shipping agencies towards their customers when being in a difficult position. You can clearly understand that we could not risk arriving in Israel without the very equipment required to put our stations on the air. This convinced us to ship our precious material as air cargo. After two days, everything arrived at Tel Aviv airport; yet our courier had not arranged for all the necessary documents needed for custom purposes and customs blocked our shipment because it was communications equipment.

We managed to clear our equipment through Customs by handing the task to our teammate Les, SP3DOI, who luckily had a one day head start on the custom clearance phases. I do not think Les, who worked in the shipping sector, would have ever imagined he would face such a nightmare. He spent an entire day working through the custom clearance issues. We succeeded in obtaining our material, due to Les' tenacity and help from our friends Ros, 4Z5LA, and Dov, 4Z4DX, whose sustained help with our activity from the early beginning helped us attain our goal. Moreover, they lent us a yagi (TNX Ruben 4Z5FI!) to be used in case our equipment had not arrived or might have been destroyed and clearly showed their sense of hospitality and availability to help us in a concrete way.

Because of the help given us by Ros and Dov, we considered them fully integrated in our team. The only disadvantage was the fact they were denied the right to cross the Palestinian boundaries, and therefore could not participate in our on-air activities. Because of the difficulties encountered with customs, I clearly noticed these radio devotees' wholehearted friendship and was deeply gratified for being able to call them our friends.

At Tel Aviv airport, we met David, Sobhy's trustworthy friend and employee, waiting for our arrival. David was a very quick-witted young man who would spend much time with us, would drive us everywhere with his small bus, would give us a hand in the collection of missing material and would transport us to our hotel. The small bus David drives for Sobhy as a tour operator is licensed to make the border crossings between Israel and Palestine, thus, the passage to our hotel was uneventful. Yet, once at our hotel we would be confronted with another unpleasant surprise!

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Our hotel was delightful, polished, and comfortable. Nonetheless, it was located on a hill with a 330° slope which disturbed our initial enthusiasm. The photos we had seen of the hotel did not show the hill as so close and so high. David made two phone calls, Sobhy checked everything again and in 10 minutes we were transported to another hotel, situated on the eleventh and highest floor! That was great!

My task to tell the E44M story finishes at this precise moment, and another colleague of mine will have to provide you the diary of a DXpedition. My reason in relating this experience is that it may concretely help everyone contemplating a future project of this nature; in fact, despite the fact that we were not radio professionals, we did reach the goal we wanted to achieve.

It is a commonly widespread opinion that a bee—due to its aerodynamics—is unable to fly. However, nature witnesses that this is far from being true, because it manages to fly thanks to its tenacity!



An 8 meter wall separates Israel from Palestine. Artists have recently taken to decorating the wall to soften its ominous appearance.



While the terrain of Bethlehem made antenna placement difficult, it also made for some breathtaking vistas.

Palestine 2009—Diary of a DXpedition

By Pasquale La Gamba, IZ8IYX

Every DXer dreams of the call with the question: “Would you consider being part of our DXpedition to a rare one?” Indeed, this was the case back in August 2008 for a few lucky hams. And, the rare one was E4, Palestine. In no way could this group ever imagine that in a few short months they would be operating from Palestine in the middle of a major war.

The story for these ops began with a phone call from Giorgio, IZ4AKS. From that point on it was a non-stop journey of planning, preparation, problem solving and more problem solving. This is part of the untold story of any major DXpedition.

A few days before the scheduled departure, the conflict in the Gaza region intensified and thus jeopardized the entire operation. With the hope that the situation would improve, the E44M schedule remained intact. Now, however, the major problem facing the group was how to cross the border between Israel and Palestine. It is one thing to be a tourist but quite another thing to travel with a group transporting radio equipment into an area engaged in a military conflict. How do you explain this to border guards? The Gaza and conflict zone was only a one hour drive away so delicate diplomacy was the only

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solution.

For this paper, we will begin the story on January 1, 2009. At 7:30 am on this day, Giorgio Minguzzio, IZ4AKS, Simone Bizzarri, IZ8BTV, Aurelio Bello, IZ0EGM and Pasquale LaGamba, IZ8IYX met at Fiumicino Airport in Rome to obtain boarding passes for a very high security El Al flight to Tel Aviv. After successfully completing an extremely intense two hour interview, the group received permission to board the El Al flight only to get word that the conflict in Gaza had intensified.

At 17:30 we landed at Ben Gurion airport. To our surprise, we were greeted by Robhy who was holding a sign which read: "Italian Radio Amateurs". Shortly after, Vinicio, IK2CIO arrived on a flight from Milan and Salvador Carol Tafall, C31CT, along with Les Fabianski, SP3DOI, arrived from Barcelona. With our group now complete, we proceeded with our escort David, to the famous "Wall" 8 meters high dividing Palestine from Israel.

After successfully navigating the border we arrived at our hotel in the very heart of Bethlehem. We soon realized that this enormous hotel was almost empty. Obviously, because of the Gaza situation, most pilgrims decided to stay away from this holy city. That was to our advantage in allowing us to maneuver on the eleventh floor hotel roof without too much scrutiny from within the hotel. We then began unloading the materials we had transported with us from Rome and inventoried the equipment previously shipped and stored at the hotel. Thanks to the expertise of Vinicio we were able to get internet access to communicate to our pilot station, Arturo, IK7JWY, who updated our Ham Radio web site. Next it was time to relax. We took some pictures and tasted some typical Arab-Palestinian food which is rich in vegetables and flavored with numerous spices. We made phone calls to our families and finally reached our rooms for some much needed rest. On January 2nd the group began the day at 6:30 AM planning the location of the various antennas. Despite cold temperatures, the team worked continually the entire day erecting the numerous antennas which included:

- Spiderbeam for 10 through 20
- Vertical for 40 & 80
- Vertical for 30
- HF2V Butternut for 40 & 80
- UJX vertical for 10 through 40

- Sloper for 160
- Dipole for 6
- EWE receiving antenna

That evening the operators faced extremely noisy conditions on all bands. On January 3rd part of the team spent the entire day on the roof attempting to eliminate the atmospheric noise plaguing our Icom 756Pro III, Icom 7000, Icom 7400 and Elecraft K2. The results of our effort to overcome the constant high noise levels was very discouraging.



Bright and early on a cold winter morning, we went about the task of assembling antennas. The "white stuff" seen on the roof is not white sand!

On January 4th the entire team operated in shifts despite the noise. No one yet had time to leave the hotel. Meals were served at the same table with an unvaried menu. The only relaxing time was spent chatting with the Palestinian people inside our hotel. However, at last, we managed to discover the source of the high noise level threatening our operation. The major source of interference was from one of the three hotel elevators. Also, in the late afternoon when the hotel heat pumps were operating the noise level increased. We soon reached the conclusion that the electrical grounding system in this hotel was totally inadequate and thus causing the major source of our noise problem.

On January 5th once we received the reassurance of our guides, Sobhy and David, that we could travel the streets, some of our team [IK2CIO, IZ4AKS and

Palestine 2009—Diary of a DXpedition (con'd)

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IZ8IYX] decided to shop for some noise filters. Once we reached the main road the high security and police presence was very obvious. We asked many hesitant local people where we might find a shop to purchase filters. This questioning was met with skeptical observation. We did not give up and finally found a telephone shop with electric internet filters. We were not very sure that this would help our noise problem, but we hoped for a miracle.



High noise levels caused by inadequate power grid grounding in the hotel could not be suppressed by locally-purchased internet filters. Yet, the team labored on to give contacts to the deserving.

Our first walk along the streets of Bethlehem was marked by our fast pace and curious looks from the local residents. By chance, we arrived at the Nativity site—the birth place of Jesus Christ. We forgot everything for a moment and decided to enter. After entering through a small door, a meter and a half high and a meter wide we proceeded toward the altar. At first glance the church appeared sober and bleak but this was totally overwhelmed by our personal emotions to be in such a holy place. None of us dared say a word. We reached the altar and discovered that the cave and the exact place of Jesus' birth was under the altar which can be easily reached via steep stairs. It was so impressive that even a non-church going person would be impressed by the atmosphere of this holy place. Each simple object in the church, each stone and column deeply witnessed the cultural and historical heritage

of the site. After the visit to the cave, the personal emotion taken from the site was so intense that in the following days some of the team members returned to the church for prayer.



IZ4AKS stands outside the Nativity Church. The birthplace of Jesus Christ is within these walls.

After returning to our operating site we connected a filter to each radio. However, as we suspected the filters provided little help in eliminating the noise. We did not get the miracle we had hoped.

The period from January 6th to the 9th flew by as we attempted to meet the needs of the North and South American Community [east and west coast]. Despite the line noise, strong signals from Europe and increased tiredness, we did our very best to increase the QSO rates to America. Also during this period there were numerous demonstrations organized against Israel and tension grew in Bethlehem. We avoided going out during these demonstrations because of the increased fighting between police and demonstrators.

We did our very best under the noisy conditions to meet everyone's needs and expectations even though it was almost impossible to follow propagation to all parts of the world on all bands each day of the operation. For the most part, I believe we did an excellent job under the adverse conditions. As an aside we found some spare moments to taste some excellent Palestinian kebab.

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Early in the afternoon of January 10th, our guide, David, accompanied us to meet our Israeli friends Ros, 4Z5LA, Dov, 4Z4DX. Sobhy also met us there. The meeting was in the Arab quarters of Jerusalem. Because of Sobhy's sense of hospitality and organization, the restaurant was exceptional. At that very moment while hostilities were high in the Gaza region, we enjoyed a time of peace and friendship involving our Israeli and Palestinian friends. This is the real spirit of Amateur Radio.



Our International Friendship Dinner had representation from Italy, Poland, Andorra, Israel, and Palestine. Amateur Radio brings together people of all nationalities.

A few hours later, after taking pictures with our IARC members friends, we returned to the Palestinian territory and spent the night working the low bands in an attempt to meet the needs of the amateur radio community.

Early in the morning on January 11th we began the chore of disassembling all the antennas. Despite total fatigue, we continued to operate until it was time to take down the last antenna.

Part of the equipment and numerous ARRL publications were given to our friend David. Our hope is that someday with the help of our Israeli friends and their commitment to amateur radio along with our Palestinian friends, our E4 activity will continue. Additional equipment was given to our Israeli friends as

a token of our gratitude for their support.

At the Tel Aviv airport we again faced intense security. After 4 hours of interrogation we said good bye to our friends departing to Barcelona and boarded our flight to Rome.

We express our sincere gratitude to the amateur radio community throughout the world for helping us accomplish our goals. In addition, we thank our sponsors, INDEXA, the IARC community and our families who bore the burden of worry during the time of our operating near the Gaza conflict. Also, we thank the ARI association who supported our activity with our IARC friends along with all our other friends world wide who made this DXpedition possible

—73 es gud DX *Pasquale La Gamba* (IZ8IYX)

For those interested, the statistics of the E44M DXpedition are included below.

E44M DXpedition Statistics

Band	SSB	CW	RTTY	SSTV	PSK3	Total
160m	72	747	0	0	0	819
80m	2324	1093	0	0	0	3417
40m	4608	2260	11	0	2	6881
30m	0	2245	465	0	0	2710
20m	5178	1641	518	1	32	7370
17m	2927	2038	245	0	0	5210
15m	1608	198	512	0	0	2318
12m	109	190	35	0	0	334
10m	14	73	4	0	0	91
6m	12	4	0	0	0	16
2m	4	0	0	0	0	4
Total	16856	10489	1790	1	34	29170

A Few Words from Gary Dixon, INDEXA President

On September 26, 2009 the Southeast DXing and Contesting Organization (SEDCO) held its fifth annual convention in Tennessee. INDEXA was again honored with a very nice cash donation by SEDCO, a non-profit organization, from the proceeds of the convention. A raffle of transceivers donated by Icom and Yaesu produced good revenue. With the donation, INDEXA will use the funds to help support deserving DXpeditions to rare or semi-rare locations.



Master of Ceremonies Dave Anderson (K4SV) presents a check to INDEXA's President Gary Dixon (K4MQG) at the SEDCO banquet.

September brought us the election of officers and directors whose terms expired in 2009. Reelected as direc-

tors were: Franz Langner (DJ9ZB), Mac Shimamoto (JA3USA), and Carl Smith (N4AA). Reelected as officers were: Gary Dixon (K4MQG), President; John Scott (K8YC), Vice President; and Bill Jennings (W4UNP), Secretary-Treasurer. Bob Allphin was elected Chairman of the Board of Directors by his fellow directors. Other directors whose terms were not up for reelection in 2009 were: Bob Allphin (K4UEE), Richard Grant (W9RG), and Lynn Lamb (W4NL).

Your officers believed we needed to provide greater clarity in the criteria used to consider support to DXpeditions seeking funding from INDEXA. While our stated goal has been to support DXpeditions to rare and semi-rare DX entities, the meaning of what rare or semi-rare meant might not have been clear. Accordingly, we have stated on our website that DX Magazine's 100 Most Wanted Countries Worldwide is a starting point for consideration.

Finally, based on member feedback, we felt we ought to suggest to a DXpedition requesting funds that we have some expectations regarding how an operation should be conducted. Yet, we did not feel it was our role to mandate specific operational aspects. To find a common ground, we asked that a DXpedition seeking funding request its team members to become familiar with the booklet "DXpeditioning Basics" written by Wayne Mills. Wayne is a former INDEXA officer and ARRL official. The booklet was co-published by ARRL and INDEXA. The booklet is accessible from the INDEXA website.

Regards,

Gary Dixon (K4MQG), INDEXA President

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